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ABSTRACT

Although the generation of creative appeals is the heart and soul of advertising, there has been little methodology developed for the classification and study of the appeals themselves. The paper recommends the use of an instrument which provides a technique that will enable the advertising researcher to develop descriptive studies of ad appeals. The technique involves compiling the existing appeals used in advertising (from ad copywriter's perspective and terminology) and categorizing them into a motivational framework (from the consumer or receiver's perspective), in order to develop a tool for their systematic study. The four categories developed in the paper (a conceptual expansion of John Maloney's marketing framework) are: rational/functional; sensory/aesthetic; social; and ego-attitude support. The paper suggests that Maloney's framework, designed as a classification of consumer motivations, can be adapted to the study of creative appeals and that possible applications include (1) usage rates of appeals; (2) time series analysis of trends in appeals usage; and (3) the comparison of appeals usage between different media and between specific advertising vehicles. The framework's strength is that as new appeals become evident they can be added as specifics under Maloney's broad categories. (One table of data is included and 50 references are appended.) (MS)

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Paper: An Instrument for the Systematic Study of Advertising Creative Appeals

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ABSTRACT

Although the generation of creative appeals is the heart and soul of advertising, there has been little methodology developed for the classification and study of the appeals themselves. The instrument developed in this paper provides a technique that will enable the advertising researcher to develop descriptive studies of ad appeals. It comprises an array of advertising appeals developed from the advertising copywriter's perspective and categorizes them into four basic groups based upon the framework of consumer motivations developed by John Maloney. Potential applications of this instrument include usage rates of appeals, time series analysis of trends in appeals usage, and the comparison of appeals usage between mediums and between specific advertising vehicles.

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An Instrument for the Systematic Study of Advertising Creative Appeals

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An Instrument For the Systematic Study of Advertising Creative Appeals

"Advertising is the single most persuasive force in the world" (Russell, Verrill, Lane 1988). The 100 largest advertisers in the country spent $27.17 billion in the U.S. in 1986 to entice consumers to purchase their products and services (Advertising Age 1987). In 1988, General Motors plans to spend over $325 million to advertise just one of their automobile lines: Chevrolet (Advertising Age 1988). The success of the company, and ultimately its ability to survive, depends to some extent upon how well those ad messages are designed by advertising's "creatives." Superior creative work oftens translates directly into increased sales for the advertiser.

Crucial to the success of the advertising campaign is the choice of creative appeal. This "'Creative work,' the process of conceiving, writing, designing, and producing ads, is the heart and soul of advertising," according to Gilson and Berkman (1980). It can motivate consumers to buy or not interest them at all. It can generate attitude change, preference or "liking"; or it can alienate.

The creative appeal must be designed to motivate the

target audience toward the desired response, to move them somewhere along Lavidge & Steiner's (1961) scale from "awareness" to "knowledge" to "liking" to "preference" to "conviction" to "purchase."

This "creative concept" or "creative approach" is, in effect, the essence of the communicated message and essential to its success.

Advertising researchers have usually studied creative appeals individually (such as the study of "fear" or "humor") or in specific market instances that allow for quantifiable results. Relatively few studies have concentrated upon the general nature and definition of the appeals themselves. Those studies have approached the problem from a variety of differing perspectives and arrived at frameworks or models that often conflict or appear fragmentary.

No tool is readily available to help answer the following types of questions: What is the usage rate of various appeals? Which are most common? How does appeals usage differ between media? Which advertising appeals are most often used in specific media? Do television commercials on network TV tend to use "price" appeals more than any other?

This study suggests Maloney's 1968 classification of motivational appeals as the most logical instrument for the study of advertising appeals, modifying and expanding the initial framework.

Literature Review

Research into advertising creative appeals has tended to fall into one of four categories:

1. Analysis of a specific appeal
2. Analysis of specific product situations
3. Analysis of appeals as they apply to specific parts of the creative process in advertising
4. Differing perspectives on appeals in general

The most commonly studied specific appeals are fear (Burnett and Wilkes 1980; Herbert 1972; Ray and Wilkie 1970; Spence and Moinpour 1972) and humor (Duncan and Nelson 1985; Madden and Weinberger 1982; Whipple and Courtney 1981; Zinkhan and Gelb 1987).

The study of specifc product situations makes it easy for a researcher to quantify results, but also makes generalizations difficult. Although Gronhaug and Rostvig (1978) found that "even modest differences in the messages may produce very different reactions", it is difficult to extract a general principle from research into the selling of knitting yarn.

Other research deals with certain elements of the creative process. For example, Beltramini and Blasko (1986) studied the appeals used in the headlines of award-winning ads, Feasley and Stuart (1987) looked at fifty years of advertising layout design and categorized

graphic approaches and styles.

Differing Perspectives Toward Advertising Appeals

Several areas of past research apply to aspects of creative appeals, while using different verbiage and nomenclature. These include studies into "motivation", "benefit segmentation", "need gratification", and "attitude segmentation". All of these areas are in some way related to the appeal that a consumer may find in an ad. But none has provided an instrument for the descriptive study of the wide range of appeals in general.

Benefit segmentation studies (Green and Wind 1972; Green, Krieger and Schaffer 1985; Haley 1971, 1984) concentrate upon the construction of a "benefit bundle" for a specific product situation. One of the most promising developments is a new computer system by Green, Krieger and Schaffer (1985) called "Bundos", which breaks out the benefits for specific products.

Several studies have categorized appeals into broad arbitrary segments and then compared them. Sawyer (1973) divided appeals into those considered "refutational" and those that are "supportive" and then compared the effects of their repetition. Wheatley and Oshikawa (1979) compared "anxiety" with "positive" and "negative"

appeals. Woodside (1968) used David Riesman's work on inner-outer directedness as it might be applied to advertising appeals. Preston and Bowen (1971) studied the "rationality-irrationality" of advertisements and determined that "designations of rationality and emotionality may be used as predictors of various advertising effects." Lynn (1974) divided appeals into four parts: logical, emotional, source attribute, and fear. He then studied these appeals in public service advertising.

Other studies have concentrated upon the emotional aspects of advertising appeals. Aaker, Stayman and Hagerty (1986) studied "warmth", and Zeitlin and Westwood (1986) apply Plutchik's theory that there are only eight primary emotions to the development of the measurement of emotion in television commercials.

Bowen and Chaffee (1974) defined the "pertinence" of advertising appeals as "the comparative discrimination a person makes between two objects in a situation where he is evaluating alternatives," a definition of pertinence that is much too narrow for the scope of the endeavor here.

A search through advertisng texts from the early part of the century to the present reveals that they usually contain at least a partial list or a sample of appeals (Bedell 1952; Bovee and Arens 1986; Burton 1974; Crawford 1966; Kirkpatrick 1964; Russell Verrill and Lane 1988;

Tipper, Hollingworth and Hotchkiss 1925), but rarely attempt a complete analysis.

Other texts discussed only certain aspects of the appeals. Zacher (1967) divides appeals along Abraham Maslow's (1970) theory of "primary" or lower wants and "secondary" or higher wants. Starch (1914) discusses "suggestive copy" and "argumentative copy" as dominant considerations. Wright (1966), in a similiar approach to Zacher (1967), compares primary and secondary needs, and then lists "buying motives", a list of appeals that are largely functional in nature.

Some of the older advertising textbooks contain a more complete discussion of advertising appeals. Nylen's text (1974) divides appeals into a complex system of opposites: emotional-rational, need arousing-need satisfying, positive-negative, selective (against competitors)-primary (generating demand for a product class), with the fear appeal discussed separately.

An extensive discussion is found in a 1926 book by Lloyd D. Herrold. Herrold breaks advertising appeals into four main categories: emotional arguments, acquired interest (such as "cleanliness", "economy"), logical reasoning, and rationalizations (justifications for non-reasoned behavior). It is difficult, however to draw the lines between categories. For example, an "emotional" appeal could also be a "rationalization"; an "acquired interest" such as "economy" could also be

called "logical reasoning".

From a different perspective, William Weilbacher (1979) divides advertising appeals into three main areas: product or service-related appeals, consumer-related appeals, and nonconsumer, nonproduct appeals. A concern in this analysis is the line of demarcation between categories. Dividing the appeals into groups along the lines of either product or consumer orientation seems to change the perspective of the issue. Are not all appeals consumer oriented?

Research Based upon the Concept of "Values"

Since the cultural consequences of advertising have long been topics of concern to scholars and critics, considerable effort has gone into the study of advertising "values", with "values" defined as characteristics or "properties of objects, individuals, or communities that make them good, worthy, or respectable" (Pollay 1983, p. 72).

This approach to the study of advertising creative messages begins with a determination of what human beings value, then looks for these values in the ad messages. Pollay's excellent work (1983) takes Rokeach's list of 18 "instrumental" and 18 "terminal" human values and modifies it to develop a coding instrument involving 47 human values (examples: modesty,

healthy, family, cheap, popular, convenient, enjoyment, etc.).

But by its very definition, the study of values in advertising brings a perspective to the problem that risks a tainting of the issues involved. The determination of the values brings with it the inherent problems of value judgements. Because the research into values in advertisng starts with what people say they value or evidently value, the process is colored with preconceptions before it even begins.

Advertising is a business whose purpose is to sell goods and services. Messages are sent that the copywriter believes will motivate people to buy the advertised product or service, whether or not that product is seen as "good, worthy or respectable" in society at large.

Values analysis in advertising may tend toward underestimating the negative motivations of consumers and their impulsive nature. People say they "value" a thin body, but may overeat when depressed. Women "value" modesty, but purchase risque nightgowns. Someone "values" being thrifty, but spends a weekend in lavish living at a ski resort on a "fling". Consumer research has shown for years that many of the motivations behind purchasing decisions are selfish, egotistical, possessive, acquisitive, or often "bad", not "good". Yet Clyde Kluckhohn in "The Study of Values" (1961) describes human values as "a set of hierarchically ordered prescriptions and proscriptions", without which "...human behavior could be described by a list of instincts and a probabilistic calculus. Human life would become a sequence of reactions to unconfigurated stimuli" (P. 20). Now

there is an interesting definition of advertising itself - "unconfigurated stimuli" - and many consumers do indeed react in much that way. Walking down the grocery aisle, George impulsively grabs a Hostess Cupcake that is displayed on sale, even though he is 30 pounds overweight and just ate lunch.

Values research may underestimate all of the following aspects of consumer behavior: instinctive, impulsive actions; reactive behavior to stimuli such as point of purchase displays; non-rational behavior; behavior based upon subconscious psychological needs of which the consumer is not even aware; purposeful rebellion against authority or the common good.

In general, values research may be assuming a more rational consumer than is, in fact, the reality.

A Framework for the Study of Advertising Creative Appeals

I suggest a pragmatic perspective for the study of advertising appeals based upon the business of advertising itself. Why not classify the appeals that the senders or encoders intend? After all, the advertising copywriters create the messages, they should know much about what they are.

This paper takes a compilation of the existing appeals used in advertising (from the ad copywriter's perspective and terminology) and categorizes them into a motivational framework (from the consumer, or receiver's perspective), in order to develop a tool for their systematic study.

All advertising appeals are, in fact, consumer oriented, to

the extent that they are all designed to communicate a message to the reader, listener, or viewer of the ad. The receiver of the ad message is the only one whose response is crucial to the success of the advertising. To understand the effectiveness or intent of that appeal, one must take into account both the viewpoint of the sender and receiver of the message.

John Maloney proposed a marketing framework that takes this viewpoint in 1968 (Britt). Designed as a classification of consumer motivations, it could be adapted to the study of creative appeals. Maloney listed "four minimal classifications of motivational appeals considered important for marketing decision-making". I quote from Britt (1968):

> 1. Rational Appeal (strict presentation of factual information)- based on a problem-solving premise that people must have some facts to go on and that their likes and dislikes grow out of cognitive or factual aspects of attitudes.
>
> 2. Sensory Appeal (promise of good taste, good smell, good feeling)-based on the reward-punishment learning theories of psychology; and stresses the pleasure principle, that most human behavior consciously or unconsciously is directed toward seeking pleasure or avoiding pain.

3. Social Appeal (promise of prestige, love, acceptance, and related rewards)-recognizes people's needs to be approved, loved, admired, or at least accepted by others.

4. Ego-attitude Support (bolstering of self-image)-serves to fulfill one's need to define one's own role and recognize one's own worth, without undue concern for the approval of others.

This is an appealing construct for several reasons. First, it encompasses most human motivations, and therefore, most advertising appeals. Contemporary Advertising, a popular advertising text used in over 100 schools, lists 42 common advertising appeals (Bovee and Arens 1986, P. 258). All are included in Maloney's framework.

Secondly, by categorizing the many appeals used by the advertising industry into Maloney's four main categories, an instrument could be developed for the study of those appeals.

Maloney's framework encompasses the other scholarly approaches. Nearly all fit rather well into one of Maloney's categories. Maslow's reknowned "lower level" needs fit category 1, the "higher level" needs categories

3 and 4. The studies cited in the literature review all fit into Maloney's system.

Most importantly, maloney's approach takes the proper perspective: the consumer's viewpoint of the appeal.

A Modification of Maloney's Framework

Maloney's "rational" appeals offer functional solutions to basic, everyday problems of living. Appeals in this category help us make our lives secure, easier, more efficient, productive and economical. This category would also include Maslow's (1970) physiological or lower-level needs for food, clothing, shelter, etc. Rational appeals would therefore include two of the most commonly used advertising appeals in the history of the business: saving time and saving money.

Sensory appeals include the pleasure emanating from aesthetics, along with all human senses. Therefore ads that appeal to us because of beautiful photography or illustation would fall into this category, along with any other appeal to the senses.

The many advertisements trying to convince us that we should use a certain product because it is "#1" apply to our sense of what our peers are doing and would be categorized as "social appeals", along with the more

obvious appeals dealing with acceptance by others. Likewise, social appeals include those appeals to our sense of concern and responsiblity for others.

Status seeking or materialistic motivations are the realm of Maloney's "ego-attitude support" appeals. And Maslow's (1970) higher needs fall into this category (self-actualization, etc.)

Using Maloney's four categories, expanding it conceptually, one might break down a list of traditional advertising appeals as shown in Table 1.

INSERT TABLE 1 HERE

Conclusion

The purpose of this study has been to develop an instrument for use in the analysis of advertising creative appeals. The strength of this framework is that as new appeals become evident they can be added as specifics under Maloney's broad categories. Certainly the specific list will need further modification.

A few qualifications should be noted. Some appeals, by their very nature, defy categorization. Humor, for example, one of the most commonly researched appeals in advertising, is listed as a sensory appeal since one enjoys the humor in an emotional sense. One might argue, however, that humor is a necessity for healthful living and therefore is a rational/functional appeal. Humor is

particularly difficult because it is also sometimes the technique of the ad and not the message.

The line between "social appeals" and "ego-attitude support" appeals is sometimes difficult to draw in a specific instance. The difference may be understood by viewing "ego-attitude support appeals" as motivations without concern for others, self-centered appeals that gratify the ego.

Application of this instrument in the study of advertising creative appeals will further refine and modify it.

Table 1

The Creative Appeals of Advertising

I. RATIONAL/FUNCTIONAL APPEALS

(These appeals offer solutions to basic, everyday problems of living; making life more secure, efficient, economical, and rational.)

1. Hunger, thirst
2. Shelter, security
3. Health (both mental and physical)
4. Safety
5. Sex (as a biological necessity)
6. News, information
7. Saving money
8. Saving time
9. Product or service qualities that make our lives better: (quality, dependability, durability, ease-of-use, effectiveness, etc.)
10. Personal productivity, efficency, effectiveness (for example: cleanliness, orderliness, etc.)
11. Risk reduction (guarantees,etc.)

II. SENSORY/AESTHETIC APPEALS

(These appeals stress the pleasure or pain of experience with the product or service. Includes all appeals to anticipated sensory or aesthetic pleasures in life.)

1. Pleasure/pain from touch (includes affection)
2. Pleasure/pain from taste
3. Pleasure/pain from smell
4. Pleasure/pain from sound
5. Pleasure/pain from sight (including visual or artistic beauty)
6. Pleasure/pain from emotions
7. Pleasure/pain from sexual feelings
8. Pleasure/pain from activities
9. Fear (avoiding pain, guilt or unpleasantness)
10. Comfort
11. Entertainment
12. Curiosity/novelty
13. Humor

Table 1 continued

III. SOCIAL APPEALS

(Social appeals deal with people's needs for approval and acceptance by others, and also an individual's sense of responsibility for the welfare of others.)

1. Product or service popularity (testimonials, "we're #1", etc.)
2. Romantic incentive
3. Being accepted by others
4. Patriotism
5. Social responsibility (courtesy, cooperation, sympathy, environmental concerns, etc.)
6. Enjoyable social activity (having a good time with others)

IV. EGO-ATTITUDE SUPPORT

(Ego appeals serve to fulfill one's need to define oneself and recognize one's worth, without undue concern for the approval of others.)

1. Materialism (acquisition of goods, "getting rich")
2. Status or prestige (pride)
3. Individualism (standing out from the crowd)
4. Career success (yuppies, upward mobile)
5. Self enhancement (other than career)
6. Defining role or lifestyle
7. Self-fulfillment (Maslow's "self-actualization")
8. Excellence or leadership
9. Progressive (modern)

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